

RIF's to circumvent veterans' preference. Section two of the bill will make it more difficult to design RIF's in this way and will improve a veterans' right to transfer to another position through priority placement within the downsizing agency or at another Federal organization.

The most important provision, in my opinion, is the creation of a redress mechanism for those who feel their rights under veterans' preference have been violated. The bill provides that a veteran may file a complaint with the Secretary of Labor within 60 days of the alleged violation. The Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Service [VETS] will have the responsibility to investigate the complaint within 60 days. If VETS is unable to resolve the complaint or has not completed action within 60 days, the veteran may file a complaint with the Merit Systems Protection Board [MSPB]. The Board has 120 days to complete its work. At any time after that, the veteran may file a complaint in Federal district court.

Equally important, the veteran may seek "make whole" relief for back pay and liquidated damages equal to back pay if the violation is found to be willful. The bill also makes violation of veterans' preference a "prohibited personnel practice" and makes any individual guilty of such violations subject to disciplinary action.

For many years, large parts of the Federal Government have been exempt from veterans' preference. The bill will extend this preference to nonpolitical and non-senior executive service jobs at the White House, Congress, and much of the judicial branch. It is long past the time when Congress, the White House, and the judiciary do their part in hiring veterans.

Next, the bill will require the Federal Aviation Administration [FAA] to implement veterans' preference in any RIF. Currently, the FAA is only required to follow veterans' preference in hiring.

Finally, the bill extends veterans' preference to the troops serving in Bosnia, Croatia, and Macedonia. These fine young American men and women are on the front line in a very dangerous area and they deserve the advantages of veterans' preference.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is the most significant improvement in veterans' preference in my memory and it deserves the strong support of this House. I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 240.

Mr. BUYER. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Florida for working as hard as he has on this legislation. I also appreciate the cooperation we've had from our colleagues on the other side of the aisle on H.R. 240.

Veterans' preference and its implementation in the Federal work force are issues that cause me great concern. We need effective and comprehensive enforcement of preference laws and regulations.

Federal agencies have long abused veterans' preference in hiring, promotion, and retention. I view the entrenched bureaucracy as the main source of the problem. There are many hiring managers that would like to see veterans go away.

They resent a veteran's presence in an organization for any number of reasons. Maybe it's because these managers didn't serve and are embarrassed by the presence of those who did. Maybe it's because they have other

diversity goals which they believe take precedence over veterans.

Our career civil servants must be made to follow the law, and their political bosses should be educated to watch closely for these unacceptable personnel practices.

The American people understand the nature of the sacrifices made for them by their veterans, and understand why veterans deserve preference—especially those disabled in the performance of their duties.

The Nation has a history of helping veterans returning to the work force and working successfully to place them in jobs, dating back to at least the post-Revolutionary War era when land grants were given in return for military service.

Veterans' preference must remain the cornerstone in hiring, promotion, and retention. Veterans' status is blind as to race, gender, age, religion, and other differences that make this Nation a melting pot. We are not arguing against diversity, but we do believe that veterans' preference must remain first among the priorities of Federal managers.

There is no excuse for hiring managers to develop ways around the hiring or retention of veterans in their employ.

Currently, there is no effective means by which a veteran may air a preference grievance, especially if the veteran is not hired. How then, are we to hold managers accountable for the provisions of law giving preference to qualified veterans?

The redress issue is at the core of the Veterans Employment Opportunity Act of 1997 and will help our veterans without harming other Federal workers.

As long as we continue to have conscientious lawmakers willing to address veterans' preference, we remain confident that we can take the corrective actions necessary to ensure its future health as a viable program for veterans who have faithfully served. I urge my colleagues to support the measure.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LAHOOD). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida [Mr. MICA] that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 240, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on the bill, H.R. 240.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

#### ELECTION OF MEMBER TO COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM AND OVERSIGHT

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Republican Conference, I offer a

privileged resolution (H. Res. 108) and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 108

*Resolved*, That the following named Member be, and he is hereby, elected to the following standing committee of the House of Representatives:

Committee on Government Reform and Oversight: Mr. Portman.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### BIENNIAL REPORT ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY—MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following message from the President of the United States; which was read and, together with the accompanying papers, without objection, referred to the Committee on Science:

*To the Congress of the United States:*

A passion for discovery and a sense of adventure have always driven this Nation forward. These deeply rooted American qualities spur our determination to explore new scientific frontiers and spark our can-do spirit of technological innovation. Continued American leadership depends on our enduring commitment to science, to technology, to learning, to research.

Science and technology are transforming our world, providing an age of possibility and a time of change as profound as we have seen in a century. We are well-prepared to shape this change and seize the opportunities so as to enable every American to make the most of their God-given promise. One of the most important ways to realize this vision is through thoughtful investments in science and technology. Such investments drive economic growth, generate new knowledge, create new jobs, build new industries, ensure our national security, protect the environment, and improve the health and quality of life of our people.

This biennial report to the Congress brings together numerous elements of our integrated investment agenda to promote scientific research, catalyze technological innovation, sustain a sound business environment for research and development, strengthen national security, build global stability, and advance educational quality and equality from grade school to graduate school. Many achievements are presented in the report, together with scientific and technological opportunities deserving greater emphasis in the coming years.

Most of the Federal research and education investment portfolio enjoyed bipartisan support during my first Administration. With the start of a new Administration, I hope to extend this partnership with the Congress across the entire science and technology portfolio. Such a partnership to stimulate